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Activation Methods as an Inspiration in Shaping the Child's Preferences in Music

Abstract

The paper draws special attention to the pedagogical aspect of music, the place and role of methods in the process of teaching and learning and their importance in music education. It characterizes the scope of the child's activity in his/her contact with music, points out to the link between children's preferences in music and the culture of their environment. It also presents research findings which are an indication of the inspiring character of methods and forms of activation in shaping music-related preferences of children of the early school age.

Key words: *activation methods, preferences in music, child.*

Introduction

Man's music culture is acquired through unintentional and deliberate influences from the environment, however the main burden and obligation regarding music education rests on educational institutions. Preparing pupils for conscious perception of music requires constant training based on guiding their observations arising in the course of listening, drawing their attention to the most important features of a given piece of music and the messages, both music-related and others, that it conveys. In order to fully activate young listeners and arouse their interest in music, it is necessary to foster their imagination and creativity from their youngest years by using tasks and exercises which inspire them to search for, perceive, remember and transform music material. At the

same time, it needs to be remembered that the more engaged children are in the performance and presentation of music, the stronger their experience and perception of it.

Method in the process of teaching and learning, and its importance in music education

In the literature on pedagogy, method is usually defined as the most typical pattern of activity performed by the teacher, a way of work, arrangement of activities geared to triggering, guiding and fostering the process of learning which is to result in some desired change in the pupil. This transformation may be described as obtaining new information, acquiring skills necessary to use the new knowledge in practice, as well as developing interests, skills, or shaping the pupil's attitude and values (Sajdak, A., 2004). Reflections on the issue of classification and description of teaching methods can be found in publications of many Polish educators, e.g. K. Sośnicki, Z. Zborowski, T. Lewowicki, J. Pólturzycki, B. Niemierko, W. Okoń, C. Kupisiewicz, and others.

In the case of general and detailed didactics of music education, the teaching methods are presented as real catalogues of paths leading to desired results. Methodological formalism which developed in traditional school didactics, deeply rooted in much-centralized education systems, prescribed a set of acceptable methods which ought to be used by the teacher during the implementation of the compulsory curriculum. Present-day didactics, which leaves it up to the teacher to select the most appropriate teaching methods, describes numerous criteria which determine this choice (goals, pupils' age, teaching material, preferences of the learner and the teacher). The most important are the teaching goals, both general and operational, established by the teacher. Therefore, the teaching material is selected for the established goals so as to ensure that these goals can be achieved by pupils. According to B. Niemierko (2001), the right selection of methods by the teacher ought to be based on the following rules: fixed order of analysis, variability of methods and flexibility. At this point it is worth mentioning the form of teaching, i.e., its organization-related aspect. In the macro scale, this notion applies to the teaching system. In the micro scale, on the other hand, the form of teaching is associated with the elements of a given system and categories governing the organization of the pupil's work (Okoń, W., 1996).

Activation methods have been presented at length and classified in specialist literature by, e.g., J. Krzyżewska, R. Więckowski, K. Rau and E. Ziętkiewicz. In their

publications, the authors emphasise that thanks to the use of activation methods, forms and techniques in the process of teaching, children train numerous skills which they would not train if traditional methods were applied (Kisiel, M., 2007).

The child's activity in his/her contact with music

The most general feature of man, which is of special interest to educators and representatives of other humanities, is the activity of an individual. There are different types of activity, and these can be distinguished on the basis of different criteria, however, educators are especially interested in activity which is peculiar to humans. The analysis of man's activity provides information about his development, and in many cases it can be an indicator of this development or a stimulus. Hence, if we are to facilitate the development of man through the process of education, we usually exert an influence on his activity (Kujawiński, J., 1990). Pedagogy distinguishes three primary spheres of man's activity: intellectual activity, emotional activity and practical activity (Włodawski, Z., 1990).

Musical activity is something natural for young people. Children like singing, experimenting with words, moving to the rhythm of music, playing musical instruments and listening to music. For them music is a universal and complete language, and it may be the best way to express their spontaneity (Kamińska, B., 1995). Musical activity of a child of an early school age is large and unreserved. It is also dependent on psychophysical development of the young person, his/her family environment and the attitude of the teacher to music classes. If these factors are conducive to the child's music development, his/her activity in this field will be cemented and will not fade away with age, but will strengthen and have a chance to fully develop. Music education distinguishes five primary forms of musical activity: singing and rhythmic talk, dance and movement to the accompaniment of music, playing musical instruments, active listening to music and making music. The child's activity in music education can be practised expressively – through making music, and perceptively – through listening to music and perceiving it. Productive expression can take a vocal, instrumental or locomotive form, implemented as musical improvisation and giving a lot of satisfaction during intensive creative thinking and action, i.e., the joy of creation. Reproductive expression is an 'amateur performance of music,' which brings a lot of pleasure resulting from the experience of music, it makes it possible to reveal one's emotions, and creates opportunities to complete numerous educational tasks. The perceptive trend in music education consists in listening and experiencing pieces of music, becoming familiar with

numerous worthwhile works of literature and gaining relevant knowledge. Both trends (expressive and perceptive) ought to be used simultaneously, thus creating a harmonious whole (Rogalski, E., 1992).

Elementary education is the first stage of primary school (pupils aged (6) 7–9), where teaching takes an integrated form. Lessons are taught by one teacher, who combines different methods, information and forms of work in selected areas of activity and adjusts them to individual perceptive and productive capacities of his/her pupils. Integrated early-school education as the ground for the child's music-related activities reveals how many functions music plays in shaping the child's personality (Kisiel, M., 2005).

The child's preferences in music as linked with the culture of the child's environment

The term preferences is usually defined as precedence, domination and advantage over something, and corresponds with the English meaning of this word, which is: placing one thing above another or prioritizing something (Szymczak, M., 1992). Preferences are connected with choosing from among different options, and may be a matter of a short – or long-lived mood or prioritizing something. The Polish counterpart of the word 'preference' is a liking for something, which is a nominal form derived from the verb 'to like', i.e., to be fond of something (Kamińska, B., 2002). This word is directly associated with choosing from among different possibilities. It also indicates that this fondness is a permanent feature. In the case of a liking for music, it encompasses not only the types of music one listens to, or those which he/she makes more willingly, but also the entire situational context in which some specific music-related activity takes place. One's preferences in music are usually identified by way of obtaining information about what kind of music someone listens to, what recordings they buy and what concerts they go to.

Research on the link between preferences in music and characteristic features of the listener was conducted by: B. Kamińska, J. Wapnick, Z. Konaszekiewicz, K. Lewandowska and others. These preferences are situation-dependent, and possible differences depend on one's habits and tradition, as well as mood, place and company. Short-term training influences the change of preferences of people of different age, who are more likely to accept a given piece of music if they have listened to it several times and, e.g., analysed it (Shuter-Dyson, R., Gabriel, C., 1986).

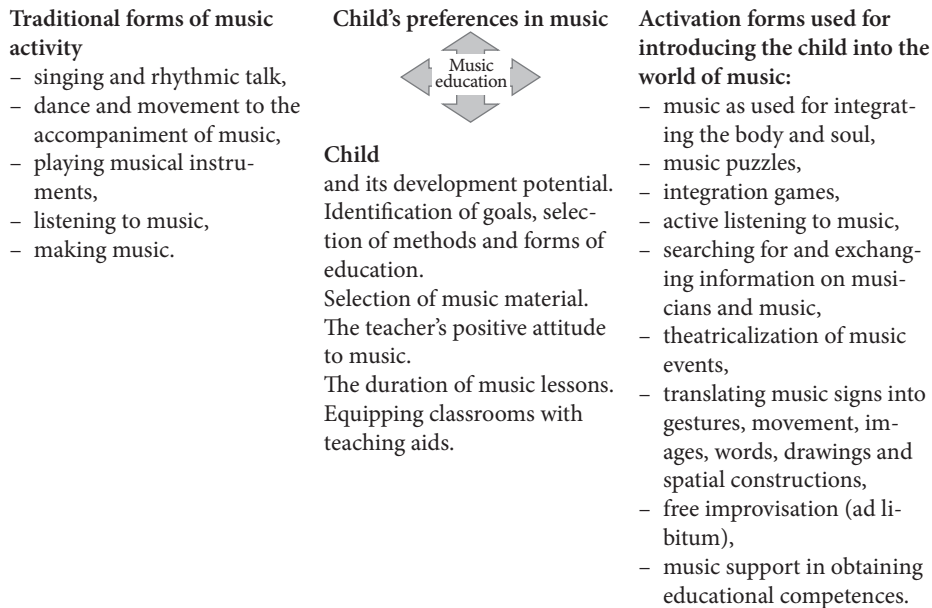
Activation methods and forms as an inspiration for the child's preferences in music

Activation of pupils encompasses all didactic and educational activities which are geared to increasing the extent to which pupils are active in the execution of particular teaching, learning and educational tasks. Postulates regarding the activation of pupils are closely related to the rule of the child's autonomy in the didactic and educational process, and are a determinant of effectiveness of this process. The said activation can manifest itself in cognitive or reproductive skills, or in social and cultural and artistic activity. Activation of pupils definitely facilitates gaining knowledge, solving problems and completing practical tasks. It also contributes to developing the pupil's interests and creativity (Okoń, W., 1996). Inclusion of activation methods in music education increases these chances by stimulating the teacher's activity, which in turn stimulates his/her pupils to act, communicate effectively, exchange experiences, ask questions, search and categorise information, and solve problems. The concept presented here coincides with the strategy of multifaceted education, as well as with the theory of multiple intelligences and acquiring core competences.

During the years 2006–2008 complex research was conducted on: *Preferences, activity and music-related interests of children of school age during the period of changes and factors which influence those*. The project was implemented in terms of the following: diagnosis of preferences in music of children of school age, the description of already existing activities geared to introducing the child to the world of music, evaluating the child's activity in selected aspects of music, as well as description of activation methods and forms as an inspiration for shaping the child's preferences in music. Furthermore, comparative studies were conducted on shaping the child's preferences in music, inspired by the use of traditional forms of music activity and activation methods and forms in integrated education. The research focused on teachers involved in early-school integrated education, as well as on children – pupils of grades I-III of primary school.

Apart from the traditional forms of music activity, the following activation methods were used during integrated lessons:

1. Traditional forms of music activity: signing and rhythmic talk, dance and movement to the accompaniment of music, playing musical instruments, listening to music, making music.
2. Music as used for the integration of the body and soul – combining artistic music with elements of P.E. Dennison's method: the thinker's hood, crossing the midline, the conductor, relaxation and others. Didactic games and music

Fig. 1. Activation methods and forms in shaping the child's preferences in music

Source: The author.

puzzles: rhythmic blocks, moving notes, puzzles, crosswords, lyrics-based tasks and others.

3. Integration games and dances: exercises making use of the animation scarf, group dances and others.
4. Active listening to music: performing music together by artists and children, preparation of quasi scores for accompaniment to artistic music, making graphic illustrations for artistic music, organization of class orchestra, etc.
5. Searching for and exchanging information: computer-based inspirations for music activity, making a class chronicle – report of music programs, preparation of thematic news sheets, collection of autographs of performers of artistic music.
6. Organization of and participation in artistic events: individual and group singing, playing musical instruments, dancing.
7. Participation in programs and integration concerts: *In the land of music*, *Music of my soul*, *Sounds of spring*, etc.
8. Theatricalization of music events: preparation of a model of F. Chopin's house, presentation of regional and European culture, e.g., *Spanish day*,

making caricatures of masters of music, preparation of music tales and stories, etc.

9. Searching for contemporary means of musical expression – *Ad libitum*: quasi score for a piece of music based on the sounds of nature, graphic work inspired by articulation capacities of music – *legato*, *staccato*, preparation of a rap-based piece containing rhymes – topic of one's choice, *sound images* – playing with consonants and vowels.
10. Music as a binding element helping the child to discover the world and facilitating the process of gaining and consolidating knowledge and different types of skills: linguistic, mathematical, cultural, environmental, etc.
11. Reducing developmental deficiencies and integrating pupils with different educational needs.

The way music material was used for the purposes of the research boiled down to the presentation of pieces of music created by such masters as: M. Rimsky-Korsakov, M. Mussorgsky, J.F. Haendel, P. Tchaikovsky, J.S. Bach, F. Chopin, C. Saint-Saëns, J.B. Lully, T. Albinoni, A. Vivaldi, D. Scarlatti, G. Bacewicz, A. Dwořak and others. It also included pieces of folk music, both Polish and from other countries, as well as electronic music, selected fragments of film music, and songs for children.

While observing students in different didactic situations, attention was paid to several elements which are important from the point of view of introducing the child into the world of music. Thanks to the introduction of activation methods and forms into the process of teaching and learning, and using them alongside the traditional forms of musical activity, the following results were obtained:

- the time the child had contact with music extended, and other spheres of cognition were enriched,
- the children became more committed to the completion of particular music tasks,
- the children's activity and involvement remained relatively high throughout the tasks and exercises used,
- the atmosphere in the classroom improved, the pupils felt safe and did not feel embarrassed while doing the tasks, were confident when making decisions, and there was a real chance that all the pupils would succeed,
- the children's involvement in traditional exercises such as singing, playing musical instruments, moving to the accompaniment of music, listening to music and making music increased twofold,
- the pupils got more courage and became more creative in accepting new challenges and using unconventional artistic solutions,

- verbal communication regarding the exchange of opinions and evaluation of music and different performances thereof increased and developed both in the classroom and outside,
- the image of the group changed – the children were dynamic, willing to ask questions and solve problems,
- the pupils contributed more to the organization of the didactic process of integrated lessons and to the preparation of artistic events,
- the status of the teacher as an animator of the child's activity related to gaining knowledge and skills changed,
- the teacher was obliged to constant preparation, both theoretical and practical, regarding different educational fields, including music,
- the information the children obtained in the course of their own experiences was longer-lasting and contributed to improving the pupils' skills related to searching for knowledge and developing their abilities.

The analysis of the research findings obtained by way of questionnaires and diagnostic sounding resulted in an outline of changes in shaping the children's preferences in music. The evaluation of the preferences of the children of grades I-III regarding the forms of musical activity, prepared by teachers involved in integrated education indicates the important role of the traditional forms of music education at this level of education. Singing, dancing and playing musical instruments are much better interpreted and more often selected or rejected by pupils than other forms of music integrated with art or other spheres of cognition. The juxtaposition of the findings, presented in Table 1, also shows that in their work the teachers prefer to follow the well-known and proven forms of interaction. They are usually very cautious when taking innovative steps in terms of music education.

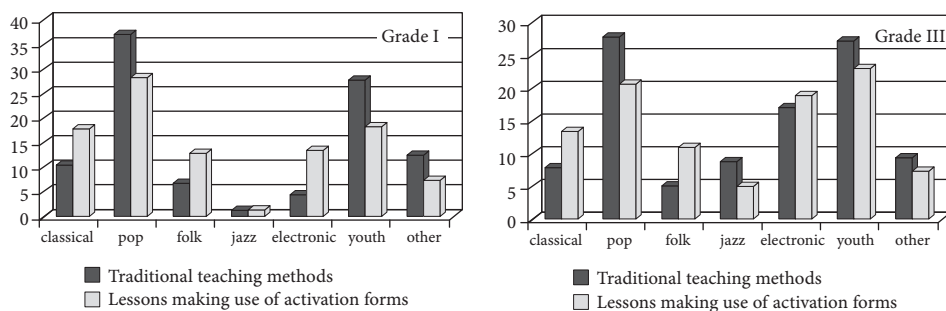
The declarations submitted by the pupils and concerning the types of music they preferred to listen to outside school revealed changes in the centre of gravity regarding the selected genres and types of music. After the whole year of work, including a cycle of classes making use of traditional and activation forms, the children's preferences in music changed significantly. Youth music, which prevails in the child's immediate environment and in the media, was still perceived as attractive, but a large group of the pupils pointed out to other, worthwhile music genres which they were beginning to consider as appealing. These were classical, electronic and folk music. Hence, the scope of the children's preferences expanded. This is definitely thanks to the educational steps taken in order to popularise artistic music among children through the use of activation methods and forms.

The scope and level of music-related preferences of the children of an early school age is best illustrated by the pupils' accounts of direct contact with a piece

Table 1: Teachers' evaluation of preferences of pupils from grades I-III related to forms of musical activity

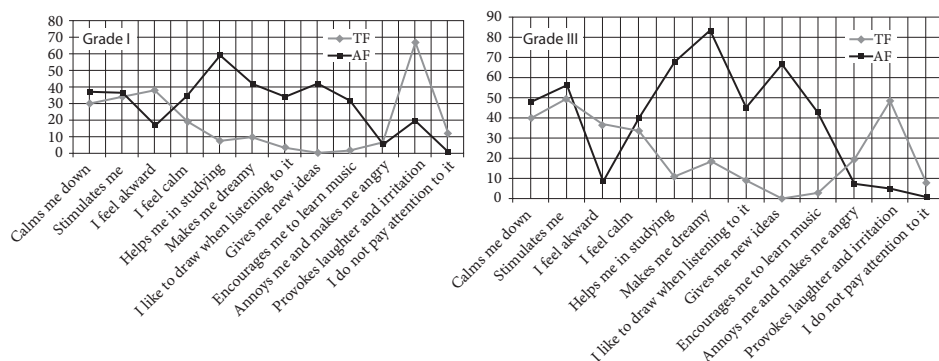
Findings presented in % form	singing	dance	Playing musical instruments	Improvisation, making of music	Listening to music	Games accompanied by music	Reading and Writing notes	Information about music and musicians	Music integrated with elements of art	Music as a common element used to experience reality
1st grade – total	20.5	21.5	19.3	4.8	4.2	12.8	3.2	0.2	8.3	5.2
girls	12.8	15.9	10.1	2.4	1.0	6.4	3.2	0.2	4.6	3.2
boys	8.7	4.6	9.2	2.4	3.2	6.4	0.0	0.0	3.7	2.0
3rd grade – total	20.6	16.2	13.6	3.6	24.3	5.7	2.4	4.4	5.1	4.1
girls	15.6	11.2	9.3	2.5	11.8	4.4	1.3	3.7	3.1	2.2
boys	5.0	5.0	4.3	1.1	12.5	1.3	1.1	0.7	2.0	1.9

Source: Questionnaires conducted among elementary education teachers.

Chart 1. Preferences in music of early grade pupils.

Source: Questionnaire on preferences in music, carried out among a group of pupils from grades I-III of primary school.

of music. If the child likes something and prefers it to other things, it shows it in its behaviour, activity and immediate response. Thanks to the use of the right proportions between the traditional and activation methods and forms, changes were observed in the pupils' behaviour. In their questionnaires, the respondents strongly emphasized the role of music in many actions which are important for that age, thus properly responding to music.

Chart 2. Children's reactions to the music listened to

Source: Interview with pupils from grades I-III on their reactions to the music listened to.

Among the reactions to music indicated by the respondents from grade I, an increase has been seen in the following descriptions: *I feel calm, it helps me in studying, it makes me dreamy, I like to draw when listening to it, it gives me new ideas, it encourages me to learn music*. Pupils from grade III, when enumerating their reactions to music, pointed out to the following: *it makes me dreamy, gives me new ideas, stimulates me, helps me in studying*. The results presented above do help to differentiate between these two groups.

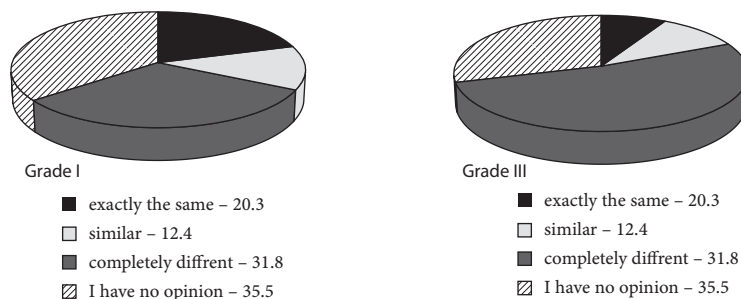
The children's increased self-esteem related to playing musical instruments was connected with expanding the capacity to perform (productive and reproductive potential) by adding new elements, i.e., music toys, a computer and a keyboard, and by attention to the good quality of musical instruments used at school. An important factor was related to the use of instruments for improvisation – to create accompaniment for songs and artistic works. The positive changes in the children's self-esteem regarding their vocal activity were obtained thanks to the use of such forms of expression which the pupils found attractive. It was important to create situations in which the pupils could freely engage in vocal play to complete creative tasks, and could use their voice in an unconventional way (humming, singing under their breath, whistling, uttering orthophonic sounds, etc.). It was also of great significance that the pupils got involved in the action 'All Poland is singing,' and they participated in numerous events, festivals and shows.

Thanks to the spontaneous and unreserved movement to the accompaniment of music, the children had an opportunity to learn and perceive their own bodies, and experience movement in different situations. The young performers had an occasion to be themselves in movement, gesture, steps or dance figures, through

which they expressed their feelings, emotional states, and from which they read specific information, at the same time maintaining non-verbal communication. The greatest changes were observed in creative activity, which apparently gradually fades as we get older. During the use of activation forms, the role of music increased in the eyes of the young artist, thus becoming more important in the process of experiencing reality and changes taking place in it by the child.¹

The introduction of activation methods and forms to integrated classes resulted in a change of the children's self-assessment of particular forms of activity. The subjects perceived themselves as involved in vocal, musical, physical and creative activity, as well as in perception of music and playing musical instruments. The pupils learnt to differentiate the scope of their own musical competences by evaluating their own capacity as compared to the group's. This shows that a change has taken place in the way music is perceived, and it positively motivates to further attempts at learning it through perception and experience.

Chart 3. Preferences in music of children from grades I and III – at school and outside



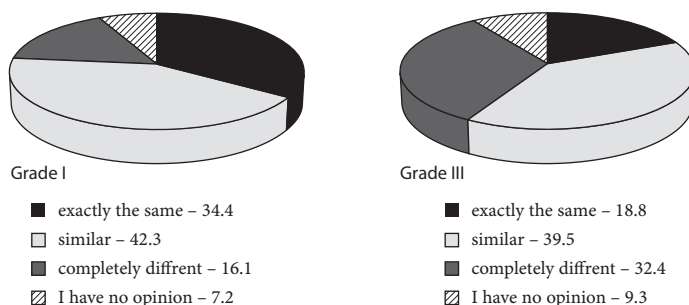
Source: Sheet presenting preferences in music of pupils from grades I-III of primary school.

The pupils from early grades of primary school indicated a difference between the music they like and its forms of activity at school and outside. The analysis of this tendency revealed changes which were taking place in the evaluations provided by the pupils from grade I and grade III. Despite a significant change which took place after a cycle of classes making use of music and activation forms, differences were still visible between the preferences of the first grade pupils and those from

¹ Fragmentary observation of musical exercises used as part of integrated education in grades I-III.

grade III. The teaching process which was analysed in the research also revealed a difference between the groups which used the traditional methods and those which used the activation forms.

Chart 4. Preferences in music of children from grades I and III at school and outside classes making complementary use of activation methods and forms



Source: Sheet presenting preferences in music of pupils from grades I-III of primary school.

Based on the findings presented herein we can assume that the use of traditional forms of musical activity and activation methods and forms which complete the didactic process during integrated classes results in a change of attitude of pupils from early grades to music. Differences between the children's preferences in music at school and outside fade away, the number of children who have no opinion on their preferences decreases, and the number of pupils who see similarities in their perceptions of pieces of music increases significantly. The changes illustrated here portend well for the future in terms of the crystallization of the desired attitudes to music during the period of adolescence. The changes observed pertain to both evaluations of the group as a whole, and to individual choices made by the pupils.

Conclusion

Musical activity of children from early grades of primary school is not just the realization of particular forms connected with vocal, instrumental, dance activity, etc., but also integration of different elements of art in the course of the child's practical activity, and simultaneous experience of music together with particular elements of reality from the point of view of different sciences.

The superiority of emotional contents in the experience and perception of music by children undoubtedly contributes to developing and shaping their preferences. Enriching the educational offer with activation methods and forms helps to prepare the young listener for active contact with domestic and foreign musical culture and for creative processing of music. Contact with music in an abstract and stimulating form contributes to stimulating the child's imagination, causing joy, stimulating empathy, and allows pupils to experience how different various phenomena are.

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